

Judges 12 - Thursday, January 3rd, 2013

(1) Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!"

- If this sounds like a déjà vu that's because it is. These same men of Ephraim did the same thing they did to Gideon by falsely accusing him.

Judges 8:1 Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply.

- The difference this time is that it would seem the Ephraimites have gotten a little bolder since chapter eight, in how they threaten Jephthah.

- Notice how, after falsely accusing Jephthah of not calling them to fight, they say to him that they're going to burn his house down with fire.

- Keep in mind that the Ephraimites were known as the quintessential complainers, such that they show us what our complaining can lead to.

- It leads to strife throughout, and division within. Sadly, this dynamic is alive and well in the church today, and it all starts with complaining.

- You can write the next chapter in this book, as it's textbook in that complaining and striving will always burn a house down on you with fire.

- Perhaps better said, people always get burned by the tongue of criticizing, complaining and even cursing as it sets on fire a great forest.

James 3:2-18 NIV We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. (3) When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. (4) Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. (5) Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. (6) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (7) All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, (8) but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9) With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. (10) Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (11) Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? (12) My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. (13) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. (14) But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. (15) Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. (16) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (17) But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (18) Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

- By the way, this applies to every arena of life, the parenting arena, the business arena and the ministry arena, where it's more pronounced.

- The reality is, there will always be people who will criticize and complain no matter what you do, and such is the case with the Ephraimites.

- These Ephraimites criticizing and antagonizing Jephthah remind of a story of old, which I think illustrates and demonstrates this perfectly.

The story of old, as it's told, goes like this; Once upon a time, long ago, in a land far away, there lived a father and his son who would often take their donkey into town to the market. On one particular occasion, the father rode the donkey, as his son walked beside them only to find that the townspeople were criticizing them saying, "look at that slave driver of a father making his son walk as he rides on the donkey." Well the father and son caught wind of this criticism and the next time they went to the market, the father had his son ride the donkey as he walked along side. No sooner had they approached the town, only to hear the townspeople once again criticizing them saying; "look at that lazy son who is young and strong making his father walk while he rides the donkey." Upon hearing this, the father and son made the decision the next time they went to the market to both ride the donkey thinking that they would once and for all not come under any criticism. Sure enough, once they arrived the townspeople again criticized them, this time saying; "that poor donkey, they're going to break his back by both riding him." Baffled by the townspeople's ability to find anything and everything to criticize them about, the father in his wisdom decided that they would both walk along side of the donkey, with neither of them riding the donkey. This time they certainly cannot complain, or so they thought. Sure enough, as the townspeople saw the father and son walking along side their donkey, they began to once again criticize them saying, "look at these stupid idiots, here they have a donkey, and their not smart enough to ride him." After this, the father was able to teach his son a very valuable life lesson, "Don't be a man pleaser, no matter what you do, or don't do, say, or don't say, there will always be people to criticize you."

Galatians 1:10 NIV Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 NIV (4) On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

- The bottom line is that Jephthah, as we'll seen next, is no man pleaser, in fact he is the antithesis of one in his response to this criticism.

- Given that we focused our attention on the Ephraimites in our study back in Judges chapter eight, I'd like to focus on Jephthah this time.

- In other words, rather than looking at why it is that people complain, we'll instead look at what happens to people when they complain.

- To say the Ephraimites won't get away with their criticizing and complaining would be a gross understatement as they confront Jephthah.

- Actually, as we saw back in chapter eight when they confronted Gideon, it would almost seem as if he were letting them get away with it.

- Let's first read how Gideon responded to the Ephraimites, and in so doing we should be able to compare it to how Jephthah responded.

Judges 8:2 So he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? (3) God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

(2) And Jephthah said to them, "My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. (3) So when I saw that you would not deliver *me*, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the LORD delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"

- Please know I'm not suggesting that Gideon was a man pleaser by responding the way he did as compared to how Jephthah responded.
- I'm of the belief the Holy Spirit gave Gideon keen discernment in responding the way he did so as to give a soft answer to turn away wrath.
- I'm also of the belief that this keen discernment came packaged with a word from the Lord that someone else would judge the Ephraimites.

- Enter Jephthah who will now be the judge whom God will use to deal with the Ephraimites giving them what they're complaining deserves.
- I find it interesting that Jephthah sets the record straight by telling them that he did call them, which means that they falsely accused him.
- Furthermore, Jephthah queries them as to why it is that they are now coming against him, in their criticism of him, to pick a fight with him.

- Apparently, the Ephraimites must have thought that Jephthah would give them a soft answer like the one that Gideon had given them prior.
- Well, they're in for the surprise of their lives because they have barked up the wrong tree this time, as we'll see with what happens next.
- However, lest you think their judgment is disproportionate, let me hasten to say, that these men were troublemakers and not peacemakers.

(4) Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites."

- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is because of this detail that's recorded concerning what they had said.
- We're told that they said; "You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites." This was an insult.
- In fact, not only was it an insult, it was a challenge of sorts by demeaning and belittling them as wimps with the other two and a half tribes.

- Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, had chosen to remain on the east side of the Jordan, and not cross into the Promised Land.
- It was for this reason that the ten and a half tribes who did cross the Jordan into the Promised Land would often discriminate against them.
- In effect, that's what the Ephraimites are doing here as evidenced by what they had said in their condescending criticism of the Gileadites.

- There's something else here that I wish to point out, and it's something for which we would be grossly remiss were we not see it in the text.
- Notice we're told in one sentence that the men of Gilead fought against Ephraim, then, the very next sentence says they defeated Ephraim.
- The reason I point this out is that it seems to indicate the Ephraimites didn't put up much of a fight. Perhaps they were all bark and no bite.

- Here's what I'm thinking, often times those who criticize us are all talk and no action. Their bark may scare us, but we have nothing to fear.
- The problem is that their loud barks of criticizing and complaining can be perceived as threatening. However, our fear is often unwarranted.
- Personally, I've experienced many times in my own walk with Jesus Christ that it's best to let the dogs bark, for they can do nothing unto me.

Psalms 118:6 KJV The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

(5) The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites *arrived*. And when *any* Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," (6) then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth!'" And he would say, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce *it* right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites.

- I realize that this may seem like a silly test in having them pronounce the word, Shibboleth, however, there's very good reason for doing it.
- In the Middle East, even to this day, there are certain dialects in all the languages spoken, and as such, you would know where one lived.
- My mother, whose first language was Arabic, had a distinct accent when she spoke English and some words she just couldn't pronounce.

- This is why they would use this method to determine whether or not one was lying about being an Ephraimite. Their accent exposed them.
- In other words, the way they talked revealed who they really were. I think there's a lesson to be learned in this seemingly nebulous detail.
- The way we talk, as Christians, should reveal who we really are. Conversely, the way some professing Christians talk exposes them too.

- Be that as it may, we're told in verse six that a total of forty-two thousand Ephraimites were put to death at that time because of this test.
- At the risk of reading too much into this, there's a striking parallel between the Ephraimites and those who don't confess and profess Christ.
- Here's how I get there, like the Ephraimites, our fate is sealed by virtue of the words we speak, when we call upon the name of the Lord.

(7) And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried among the cities of Gilead.

- Well, it looks like we have to say goodbye to Jephthah, at least for now anyway. We will see this man of faith again when we get to heaven.
- I find it interesting that he only judged Israel for six years. I wonder if all he went through during those six years led to his untimely death.
- He'd been through a quite a bit from being exiled, to becoming a deliverer, to his rash vow, then adding all the drama from the Ephraimites.

(8) After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. (9) He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years. (10) Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem. (11) After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel. He judged Israel ten years. (12) And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Ajalon in the country of Zebulun. (13) After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. (14) He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years. (15) Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.

- The chapter comes to an end with a list of three minor Judges starting with Ibzan, who really had his hands full with 30 sons and daughters.
- We're told he died after judging Israel seven years, at which time he was succeeded by Elon who judged ten years, then lastly was Abdon.
- It seems Abdon had forty sons, and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys, which may have killed him after eight years.

- I'd like to close by identifying the take away from this relatively short chapter that's obviously packed with a relatively long list of life lessons.
- Chief of which is the lesson we can learn from the life of Jephthah who was a mighty man of valor, and a spirit filled man with discernment.
- Like Gideon before him, he was able to discern what do to with the Ephraimites. They had the same discernment, but a different treatment.

- This all begs the question of whether or not one can know if they are a Gideon or a Jephthah when they are faced with their Ephraimites.
- First and foremost it's important to know that there are Gideon's and Jephthah's and even worse, Ephraimites that are in the body of Christ.
- It's for this reason that we must have the discernment to know how to respond when confronted by Ephraimites. Consider these Proverbs.

Proverbs 15:1-2 NKJV A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. (2) The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

Proverbs 26:4-5 NKJV Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him. (5) Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.

- So now we have three different ways we can respond to our Ephraimites on the table, a soft answer, no answer, or an according answer.
- So what's the answer to how we answer? Answer, it depends. Sometimes we need to take the posture of a Gideon and give a soft answer.
- This is a starting point in the sense that I can take their temperature, so-to-speak, to determine if they're a troublemaker or a peacemaker.
- Some people are not looking for an answer they're looking for an argument, and often times it's evidenced by their response to our answer.
- If they keep moving the goal posts, becoming argumentative and combative, it's a good indication that you're dealing with an Ephraimite.
- If you discern you're dealing with an Ephraimite, then you're better off not answering a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.
- If you're not sure you're dealing with an Ephraimite then you're better to answer him according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes.
- More specifically, answer their question with a question, which is what Jephthah does when he asks why they're picking a fight with him.
- I'm convinced and I've experienced that answering them accordingly with a question will usually seal the deal as to who I'm dealing with.